

2016 Massachusetts Community Transportation Coordination Conference

Introduction to Volunteer Driver Programs

Presenter/Facilitator

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Four Basic Elements

There are four basic elements to a Volunteer Driver Program:

1. Host Organization
2. Volunteers
3. Passengers
4. Vehicles

Host Organization

The host organization is responsible for starting and maintaining the volunteer driver program. This may include scheduling rides, recruiting, screening, and training volunteers, recruiting and enrolling passengers, and purchasing liability insurance policies. In many cases the host organization provides, at minimum, administrative support to the program through staff time. Support activities include taking calls, scheduling and coordinating rides.

Volunteers

Recruiting volunteer drivers is one of the most challenging parts of running successful programs. Many programs rely on recently retired people. Retired police officers, firefighters and veterans are popular recruits.

- Retired police officers, firefighters and veterans make good volunteer drivers because they are often already trained to drive community vehicles, have CPR and First Aid training and know how to handle interactions with vulnerable populations.

The TRIP model: This approach recruits passengers instead of drivers. Passengers themselves have to recruit drivers, and the agency issues reimbursement up to a certain monthly mileage cap. This model works well for passengers who have ties to the community, as passengers often recruit drivers who are family, friends or neighbors. The TRIP model is flexible and minimizes the host agency's administrative burden.

- Mystic Valley Elder Services (MVES) hosts the Trip Metro North program. Their program has no restrictions on trip purpose, time or date of trips. This program has been very successful, but MVES reports that they sometimes have to coach passengers in asking their friends and neighbors for rides.
- There is minimal or no liability for the host agency since it is not providing a service or recruiting volunteers.

Passengers

The pool of passengers is typically dependent on the target population of the Host Organization. Programs are most often set up with seniors as the target population, but programs also exist to support veterans, cancer patients, and others.

Vehicles

Some programs make use of agency-owned vehicles, while others use driver-owned vehicles. The latter is often a cheaper and simpler option.

- Programs which use driver-owned vehicles typically issue mileage reimbursement to drivers; sometimes they also cover tolls and parking fees.
- If the agency's program uses agency-owned vehicles, it is important to have a commercial auto policy to cover the vehicles. The agency should also have a conversation with their insurance agent to discuss the impact of having volunteers drive the agency vehicle.

Drivers

Driver Screening

CORI and RMV checks are a must.

- Additional screening could include personal or professional references as well as ongoing passenger feedback. Periodical passenger feedback can be collected formally, through surveys, or informally through conversations with riders about the quality of their drivers and rides.
 - RMV Check: Driver records can be obtained online through the RMV Online Branch (www.massrmv.com/OnlineBranch). The cost of the transaction is \$6.00 each unless you are a federal, state, or local government entity. Driver consent is required.

Driver Training

- Agencies using MassDOT funded vehicles are required to have all drivers trained in the following areas. All of these courses are offered for free through the Massachusetts Rural Transit Assistance Program (MArtap), unless noted.
 - Defensive Driving (formerly Coaching the Van Driver, NSC DDC3)
 - Accessible Lift Use and Passenger Securement (formerly Wheelchair Lift & Securement)
 - Disability Awareness (formerly Safe Transport of the Public under the ADA)
 - Drug & Alcohol Awareness Safety Sensitive (online course)
 - CPR (Not offered by MArtap)
 - First Aid (Not offered by MArtap)
- MArtap training sessions are primarily geared to rural and small urban transit providers. However, all service providers are welcome to attend for free. Advance registration is required. For more information go to www.martap.org or contact Abril Novoa Camino at abril.novoa-camino@dot.state.ma.us.

Driver Retention

While driver retention is always a challenge, some incentives can help retain drivers longer. Here are some examples:

- Gas cards
- Volunteer recognition/awards

Risk & Liability

- **Driver insurance:** The host agency should always check the drivers' insurance policies. Mandatory insurance in Massachusetts is \$20,000 per person/\$40,000 per incident. Anyone holding insurance at these limits is meeting the legal standard, but this insurance is generally considered inadequate for covering actual crashes. Some programs require volunteers to hold a higher limit, such as \$100,000 per person/\$300,000 per incident.

- **Insurance boost:** Host agencies may want to help or encourage boosting the insurance levels of volunteer drivers to higher levels, to minimize agency risk.
- **Umbrella insurance:** Umbrella insurance is strongly encouraged. It is affordable, costing between \$500 and \$700 per year and covering 100 volunteers.
 - Municipal agencies typically have umbrella insurance covering all municipal volunteers for all volunteer activities. Check with your municipal insurance provider to see if these policies already include driving.
- **Insurance Rates:** It is not technically allowed for insurance companies to raise rates on individual policies if the person insured is a volunteer driver. However, many companies ignore this and try to raise rates anyway. It is always a good idea to speak your insurance provider before starting to volunteer so that you can have that discussion before your volunteer service starts.
 - True for volunteers and host organizations alike – get to know your insurance agent. It is always a good idea to have someone you can trust and who can explain the terms of your insurance policy clearly and accurately.
- **Volunteer training:** It is essential to train volunteers on all aspects of risk and liability.
 - Volunteers need to understand what to do in case of an incident – who to call, what to do, how to report an incident.
 - Volunteers and passengers should assign emergency contacts

Other Topics

Scheduling software/automatization

Some programs are available for purchase that can help automatize some of the most time-consuming activities in managing volunteer driver programs.

- RideScheduling.com
- American Cancer Society developed their own custom system

Ride duplication issues

Sometimes passengers will book redundant rides with multiple agencies (paratransit, COA, volunteer driver). If duplication happens more than once with the same rider, the host agency should arrange ride requests with another responsible adult such as a care giver/primary contact/case worker.

Ongoing peer support

Join the Volunteer Driver Network forum to keep up-to-date, share information and learn best practice. To join, contact Theadora Fisher at theadora.fisher@state.ma.us or Rachel Fichtenbaum at rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us.